

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL.

RECKLESS RALPH'S



A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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HARRY CASTLEMON

Sent in by Hermon Pitcher

HOW I CAME TO WRITE MY  
FIRST BOOK

When I was sixteen years old I belonged to a composition class. It was our custom to go on the recitation seat every day with clean slates, and we were allowed ten minutes to write seventy words on any subject the teacher thought suited to our capacity. One day he gave out "What a Man Would See if He Went to Greenland." My heart was in the matter, and before the ten minutes were up I had one side of my slate filled. The teacher listened to the reading of our compositions, and when they were all over he simply said: "Some of you will make your living by writing one of these days." That gave me something to ponder upon. I did not say so out loud, but I knew that my composition was as good as the best of them. By the way, there was another thing that came in my way just then. I was reading at that time one of Mayne Reid's works which I had drawn from the library, and I pondered upon it as much as I did upon what the teacher said to me. In introducing Swartboy to his readers he made use of this expression: "No visible change was observable in Swartboy's countenance." Now, it occurred to me that if a man of his education could make such a blunder as that and still write a book, I ought to be able to do it, too. I went home that very day and began a story, "The Old Guide's Narrative," which was sent to the **New York Weekly**, and came back, respectfully declined. It was written on both sides

of the sheets but I didn't know that this was against the rules. Nothing abashed, I began another, and receiving some instruction, from a friend of mine who was a clerk in a book store, I wrote it on only one side of the paper. But mind you, he didn't know what I was doing. Nobody knew it; but one day, after a hard Saturday's work—the other boys had been out skating on the brick-pond—I shyly broached the subject to my mother. I felt the need of some sympathy. She listened in amazement, and then said: "Why, do you think you could write a book like that?" That settled the matter, and from that day no one knew what I was up to until I sent the first four volumes of Gunboat Series to my father. Was it work? Well, yes; it was hard work, but each week I had the satisfaction of seeing the manuscript grow until the "Young Naturalist" was all complete.

—Harry Castlemon in the Writer

Some of the books written by H. Castlemon and others, and published by Harry T. Coates & Co.

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**"HOW TO BECOME A VENTRLOQUIST"**

(By Seajay)

I saw the little, yellow-backed booklet in the window of the old German who ran the tobacconist's shop in my home town and which contained a sanctified corner having tables on which were laid out the various publications dear to the heart of every lad whose posterior parts had not escaped a good lathering..which same, seemingly, only tended to increase the daily sales of the old German's Bead-

le's "Wars" etc. At any rate, the price of the booklet was 10 cents. I "hooked" that dime out of an old teacup in which mother kept small change on a cupboard shelf. It's purloining, should have bothered my conscience. It did not. It was to be devoted towards the serious project of becoming a well-paid "thrower of my voice". After a struggle, in which I was coached by a neighboring boy to the effect that it was necessary for me to "swallow my voice" besides doing what Harry Kennedy's book described in the series of directions, I finally "perfected" myself, posed before a mirror, making strange sounds, squeaks, squeals, and gurgles without moving my lips..as per instructions. Then I called in little Joe, the neighbor's boy, attracted his attention toward the direction from which he was supposed to hear a voice, and let fly. Little Joe turned around, and I asked him if he had not heard his mother calling. His scornful reply, "Aw, dat's YOU", put a dismal period to further effort to become rich by "throwing" my voice.

Harry Kennedy, our readers may be somewhat surprised to learn, was interested enough in the conquest of air by heavy apparatus, to write tales of adventure dealing with the subject. I have two in my possession, Nos. 174 and 187 of the BOY'S STAR LBY., the first dealing with an elongated, sharply tapered cigar-shape air-ship, which was drawn upward through the usual "Frank Reade" type of whirling "rotoscope"., the precursor of the modern gyroscope. Sail-like side-paddles furnished the propulsion. The title of this tale is "AROUND THE WORLD IN THE AIR". The second of these, entitled "THE FLYING MAN", describes a weird apparatus, the "rotoscope" being spun by a treadle...foot-power. The propelling factors being a couple of huge, bat-like wings. And away back in 1879 Tousey's WIDE AWAKE LBY. published in Nos. 256 and 257 the tale "THE FLYING SHIP OF THE PACIFIC" and sequel, "THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY FRANCO" who invented this combination of air-and-water craft which was propelled by steam or electricity, and required a runway of some 1000 feet to acquire momentum sufficient to rise in the air, it having two sets of wings amidships and one set in the

bows. But what overcome gravity once on the wing, deponent sayeth not, the woodeut illustrating a small boat-propeller in rear. And how down-hill runways were encountered from which to start-off after landing in a jungle, is the reader's guess. The story is no doubt a reprint from an English publication. Finally, the haunting fragrance of that store's tobacco, lingers to this day.

### NOVELNUT NONSENSE

HAPPY NEW YEAR BROTHERS. Ring out ye cockeyed bells, ring out!

WHOOPEE! EUREKA! Thus far, save for one letter smelling mildly of resentment....and strongly of old cheese, a few bouquets and no brickbats, despite our Colyums whacks at the devoted conks of ROUND-UP'S game Brethren, Malice with us is OUT. Just "foolishment", lads.

SUSPICIOUS INCIDENT: Brother Frye reports he is convinced that he recently saw Brother Bill Burns foot-racing with a copper. Bill whizzed past Bob with the cop two jumps behind and going strong. Both were hull down in one minute and mere specks in the distance in thirty seconds more. If this was only a Marathon stunt, WHY THE CLUB in the cop's hand? An exhausted cop, according to press report, died on the Canadian border. Bill denies all, but his asthma is a trifle worse.

OUR DEAN, Brother Maroske, whose snores have the impact of a war-whoop, found respite in the purchase of a new bed, but now finds he cannot sleep at all for thinking of what he paid for it. Incidentally, we have, at his recommendation, offered membership to his boon companions, Dopey, Butch, and Stinky, who are, respectively, Mr. Hans Ziegenbochbinder, Mr. Jake Bultz, and Mr. Gumpartz Schlachenlichter.

OUR STERLING NATURALIST, Brother Miller, advises that he has uncovered fossilized bones of prehistoric "elephinks" in his back yard. Strange the oddments and twiddles that come out of Texas. We, in Massachusetts, call them elephants.

RECKLESS RALPH'S chest-misery is much improved, thanks to mud-baths, horse-liniment, and catnip-tea.

CALL ON "Oklahoma Joe, the Village Barber". He snips 'em off, and clips 'em off, and rips 'em off, and claws 'em off, and paws 'em off, and

chaws 'em off. Brother Joseph Potaski's place is open all night.

AMAZING: We understand that as a child Brother Pitcher developed an odd idiosyncrasy which persists. He sleeps with his feet up in the air. His latest hobby is the collecting of small green hop-toads.

DISTRESSING: On November 6th., Brother Madison swallowed his campaign button. At ROUND-UP HOSPITAL it was resurrected along with a tooth-brush and a shoe-horn. We understand the presence of a tooth-brush, but pass up the shoe-horn.

WINTER IS UPON US: Brother Beck's old brown hen has quit laying.

ALAS! The "Old Ladies' Knitting Society", organized for humanitarian reasons by Brother Dawson, is no more. At their last meeting one old frump scratched our Brother's nose over an election argument. The organization was disbanded. Brother Rawson's ear also hangs by a thread and a dark cream-puff has budded on his lower lip.

FOR SPECKS BEFORE THE EYES: Bragin's NOSE-PAINT CORDIAL. (Advt)

LATEST COMPOSITION by Brother Austin: "Be still, my throbbing heart". Arranged for bass-drum and bull-fiddle. (Note: A strong man recommended at the bass drum to punctuate heart-throbs).

BY HEAVENS, it has happened. My pipe went out. Well, cheery-bye, and let loose your "dogs of war" (if any) Brothers, or forever hold your peace.

### WAKE UP!

What is the matter with our dime novel collectors?

Are they losing interest in the hobby? If so, why?

Properly conducted, dime novel collecting should give enjoyment of a lifetime.

But some collectors are satisfied to keep their collections "as is" without any change. These lose practically all the fun, for one soon tires of just looking at the same novels!

Others are discouraged, believing there are no further novels to be found, no way of increasing interest in their collections, except at heavy cost—and money is not hay these days!

All of which is wrong, for there is a great deal of enjoyment to be gotten

out of the hobby, without expense.

Trade — swap — exchange. Get rid of those novels, — yes, even those favorites of yours — for new ones. You can't take it with you, so why hold on to old time stuff when you can gladden your eyes with new items?

Correspond with other collectors. Get off at least two letters a week to brother collectors. You'll get lots of fun out of the writing and the reading of letters, and this won't cost you a dime a week!

Did you read L. Morgan's recent article "My First Novel"? Note how he started to collect. Somebody saw a letter he wrote published in the Tip Top "Applause Columns", got in touch with him, and started his collecting career.

Why not look up your copies of Tip Top and other weeklies which published such letters, and thus locate old time readers in your own neighborhood?

Sure their letters were written years ago, and the addresses shown are all wrong now — but you can trace the writers by looking them up in your local phone book.

You will find that some of them have accumulations of the old dime novels, which you can buy up for your own collection, at bargain prices!

Others, who have none, will make fine prospects for collecting — and it is the DUTY of every dime novel collector to get others into the hobby! And lots of fun, too!

### ONE ROAD TO HEAVEN

A CHRISTMAS STORY

By Will J. Bennis, Jr.,

Christmas Eve in Philadelphia, a regular old-fashioned Christmas Eve.

The snow lay deep and white over the city.

About three o'clock of the short December day it had begun to fall in a white whirling shower, and had continued steadily for hours.

No fear of a green Christmas on the morrow. What a different aspect it put upon the scene.

A regular old-fashioned Christmas like those of which our grandparents loved to tell us.

Just the kind of Christmas Eve for jolly old Santa Claus to make his annual round, his sleigh packed full of presents for good little boys and girls.

How his eight prancing reindeer steers must rejoice at such a sight,

as the soft flakes covered the roads with a silence deep and white,  
"Every fir, and pine and hemlock,

Wore ermine too rich for an earl,  
And the poorest sprig on the elm tree,  
Was fringed inch deep with pearl."

What an inquisitive snow it was, and so full of glee, too, as it whirled by, brushing one's cheek with a playful kiss of cheer, as much as to say; "Well, old fellow, we will both enjoy Christmas together," and then off again, filling the dusty cracks and crevices with pure white ermine.

Everywhere, everywhere, whirled the snow.

Then darkness settled down over the busy city, and a chill, cold wind came from the north and began a battle with its white enemy.

At first it seemed as if the intruder would be vanquished, but it made such desperate efforts that after a little while the snow began to feel its power. Slower and slower it fell, and then as the bitter cold grew more intense it ceased entirely. But there seemed a triumph even in the snow's defeat, for it sparkled and shone with a billion eyes in the mellow glow from the brilliantly lighted stores and the handsome houses, all decorated and illuminated in honor of the momentous occasion.

Everybody seemed happy. Well, why should they not? "Christmas comes but once a year; When it comes it brings good cheer."

Why should not I forget self in watching the pleasures of those about me, and grow young again in their enjoyment—happy and care free?

What matter though I am growing old—and with neither kith nor kin in the world—I had a comfortable annuity, enough to eat and drink, a roof to shelter me, and a warm fireside to sit by and dream over again the golden vanished dreams of my perished youth and the illusive visions it held of a bright future. Well, the future was now the present, and the present was not alluring. For as the encroaching years had rung out their changes, one by one, the little home circle had narrowed down, one more vacant chair, and she had gone; "Mary," the bright-eyed girl who had promised to be my wife

"The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that I have prest  
In their bloom;  
And the names I loved to hear

Have been carved for many a year  
On the tomb."

In her grave I had buried hopes on earth. I had nursed in my heart the memory of her parting smile ere she had closed her weary eyes and slept the long last sleep; and no other woman could ever make me for an instant false to her dear memory.

"There goes an old fogey!" I heard it that very day, and I knew it was true. My only companion was a dog, a favorite collie that I had raised from a wee puppy and who loved me with almost a human love. Carlos and I were out this cold Christmas Eve for our regular constitutional. We had left the business portion of the city far behind us. I was thinking sadly of my lonely home and the cheerless Chirstmas before me, when suddenly arousing from my sad musing I found we had arrived at one of the great iron structures which spans the Schuylkill river.

Carlos stopped suddenly, looked up wistfully into my face and wagged his bushy tail, as if to say:

"Have we not come far enough, master?"

I was about to agree with my four-footed friend and retrace our steps, when the sound of voices—singing—came to me and involuntarily I paused to listen. It was a Christmas carol, sung in a childish treble, and it told of "Heaven and angels and harps of gold." I advanced slowly in the direction from whence the sound emanated, and came upon an unexpected sight. There, crouching upon the great stone seat, in one of the bridge's recesses, closely huddled together for warmth, were two little street gamins—waifs of the city streets—their scant, ragged clothing illy affording protection from the biting chill of that Christmas Eve.

The oldest—he could not have been over ten—had thrown his arm over the stone railing at the back of the seat, and partly around the shoulders of his companion, and I saw that the singer was some three years his junior.

It was not so much the ill-fitting coat, which evidently belonged to some older person, or the tattered trousers and the dilapidated shoes, from which peered his blue-looking toes, that won my sympathy, but the boy's face.

Such an old-looking face, pinched and haggard—the beautiful blue-gray

eyes sunken deep in their sockets, and the violet hue beneath them, which denoted plainly neglect and starvation. It was a face which attracted and held me with a strange feeling of interest. I am a reader of character, and rather pride myself on my knowledge of physiognomy. I gazed with deepest interest upon the child's face, lit up with a wondrous glow, the beautiful eyes filled with "that light never was on land or sea," as though he saw before him the glories of that heaven of which he sang so sweetly. I stood where the shadows hid me and knew that my presence was not observed.

The song died away in the moonlit stillness, which lasted but a moment, when the little singer spoke:

"Say, Jack, heaven must be a bully place! You know the missun cove that preaches Sundays and learnt me that song? Well, he says the kids in heaven has good clothes and lots to eat, and it's jolly and bright and warm. 'Tain't very warm here, eh, Jack? Golly, but it's awful cold!"

"You bet, Mike, it's freezin' fast; but dad told us to wait here fur him. He said he'd be back inside of an hour. See! it's most nine now," pointing to the bright, open face of the large clock in the tower of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Station.

"We'd better not go till dad comes, 'cos if we did he'd lam us sure the next time he got ahold of us. Oh, dear! I wish we could go somewhere and get warm!"

"The missun cove's comin' tomorrow," burst in Mike eagerly, "and he's goin' to give us all a dinner. Guess what we're going to have to eat? Guess, Jack! Why turkey! And we're to have our fill and it don't cost a cent—'cos its Christmas Day, and the missun gives us boys a spread. It's for Christ's sake. I tell you, Jack, he must be a mighty nice old fellow—Christ must—'cos all this fuss is goin' on fur him; and the cove sayes he died years ago—oh, a long, long time ago—but the people all loves him, 'cos he's so good, and they are all glad to 'member the day he was born, and they says he loves little boys, too. Does he, Jack? Say, maybe if we was to go to him he might let us stay with him, and wear nice clothes and be warm. The song says there's a road to go to heaven; I wonder where 'tis, Jack?"

"I don't jes' know, Mike. Mom says, afore she 'went up' fur six months fur gettin' drunk, that one way to heaven was there!"

"Whereabouts, Jack?" cried Mike, all eagerness, starting to his feet.

"Why, down there! down there!" and the elder boy drew his companion to the iron parapet of the bridge and, leaning over the snowy rail, pointed to where the river surged deep and muddy and brown; dotted here and there with floating cakes of ice.

"That must be one of the roads to heaven," Jack went on, thoughtfully.

"Sal Gregan fell in the river one night, and when they fished her out she was as dead as a mackerel; and mom said she'd gone to heaven."

Mike lifted his wondering eyes to his brother's face, then leaned over the slippery railing as if he fancied he could catch a glimpse of that wondrous heaven mirrored in the dark waters below.

"I wish I could go to heaven and be warm, and have a good time!" he cried yearningly.

Then I do not know just how it happened, but there was a sudden waver of the slight figure; he lost his balance, and ere I could reach the spot fell—fell over the railing, and I heard him strike heavily upon the stone buttress below.

There followed a splash, and a heart-rending cry of "Oh, Mike!" from Jack, and for an instant it seemed that Jack, overcome with terror, was about to follow him; but I caught his swaying body. Then, as I gazed with horrified eyes, I saw Mike's form rise to the surface, and, thank God! catch on the ragged side of one of the cakes of ice that were floating in the river.

It was but the work of a moment to dash down the spiral iron steps and quickly divesting myself of my heavy fur coat, I was about to plunge into the icy water, but Carlos, God bless him! was before me. He gave a leap and landed on a swaying cake of ice—thence springing onward, made for the foe which held the boy's insensible body.

Brave dog! His strong white teeth clutched the boy's dripping garments, and he held on, at the same time uttering low cries to me, as if to say: "Hurry, master, hurry!"

A boat used by the river men happened to be moored near. In a moment I was in it, and with a few pow-

erful strokes the boat cut in between the surging ice cakes, and poor Mike's bruised and bleeding body lay in the boat at my feet, with Carlos licking the white, upturned face, and I saw by the bright light of the moon that the boy was seriously hurt—perhaps dead!

Jack had not been idle; the life of the streets makes its children older than their years.

He had been fortunate enough to find a policeman at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Depot, and soon an ambulance from the nearest hospital bore the apparently lifeless body into its friendly portals.

Christmas morning came, and I went from my lonely home to the hospital to see poor little Mike.

The ward looked quite gay, all dressed with holly and evergreen in honor of the occasion; the patients, too, were trying to look bright, and everything was so clean and white it did one's heart good to see it. There had been Christmas service, and a few voices—how soft and sweet they were!—were singing the same carol that poor little Mike had sung on Christmas eve—on the bridge just before he had gone to meet his doom. For he was dying; poor little Mike, his hours were numbered. The fall had broken his back, and he was dying from internal injuries.

Upon the white bed the lad lay, half conscious, and the voices of the singers, in a faint, sweet refrain, floated to his ears.

Slowly to his benumbed brain came the recollection of what the preacher at the mission had told, of the white-robed angels with their golden harps, and the warm, bright heaven.

"I'm there," he whispered faintly. "I'm in heaven! Oh, how nice and warm it is!"

Swiftly, softly, I stepped to the bedside and gazed down upon the white, pinched face. Mike looked up at me with the sad, gray-blue eyes so soon to behold the glories which earthly vision may not see.

"Please, are you Christ?" he asked softly.

Something seemed to tear at my heartstrings. There was a nervous constriction of the throat, and I felt the hot tears streaming down my cheeks. Ah! what a selfish old man I had been! and how I had neglected

the opportunities or doing good which lay all about me! Had I indeed followed the blessed Master's directions, and fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and destitute in their poverty and desolation?

I fell upon my knees beside the white bed, and took the cold little hand in mine.

"Please, Christ, won't you let Jack come, too? I miss him so, Oh, there he is now!" starting up from the pillow as his eyes fell upon Jack entering the ward in charge of an attendant. But the effort was too much for form in my arms and called his the dying lad. I caught the slight name, but alas! the gray-blue eyes were set and staring into vacancy; the slight form lay very still; no breath fluttered from the pale lips; an awful silence had settled over the scene. Little Mike had found the road to heaven, and upon that bright Christmas morning he had gone where he would never know hunger, or cold, or harsh treatment; never any more.

Who can say Jack did not tell him right?

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